

Implementation of physical activity and healthy eating policies and practices by New South Wales childcare services: Changes from 2006 to 2013

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Background

Since 2008, New South Wales (NSW) government has invested in state wide initiatives to support childcare services implement policies and practices supportive of healthy eating and physical activity. The aims of this study are to describe changes in proportion of NSW childcare services that have implemented recommended healthy eating and physical activity promoting practices between 2006 (pre-targeted investment) and 2013 (5-years post investment since 2008), and assess whether implementation varied by socioeconomic (SES) and locality of services in 2013.

Methods

A randomly selected sample of authorised supervisors from childcare services located in New South Wales, Australia completed a telephone survey in 2006, 2009, 2010 and 2013. Supervisors reported on service implementation of six healthy eating and physical activity practices related to policy, staff training, scheduled time for activity, restricting screen time opportunities and serving non-sweetened beverages. To determine the change between 2006 and 2013 as well overall trend, repeated measures logistic regression in a GEE framework was undertaken.

Results

There was a significant increase in the prevalence of services implementing all but one practice between 2006 and 2013. 91% of services reported implementing four or more practices in 2013, a significant increase from 38% (2006). There were no differences in the proportion that had implemented each practice by locality and SES in 2013.

Conclusions

These findings suggest that government investment in obesity prevention programs can equitably improve childcare service's healthy eating and physical activity environments. Further investment to support implementation and monitoring of a more comprehensive set of practices in this setting is required to improve obesity prevention efforts.